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A PERSONAL HISTORY OF INVASIVE HANDS AND ENDANGERED LOVERS

By

SAMUEL PAUL BOUDREAU

Bachelor of Liberal Arts, Middlebury College, Middlebury, Vermont, 2015

THESIS

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts  
in Creative Writing, Poetry

The University of Montana  
Missoula, MT

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## ABSTRACT

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Creative Writing

An Anthology of Invasive Species

Chairperson: Sean Hill

I thought I could be ridden hard and put away wet, wet, wet. I thought death and rape and drunkenness and unrequited love were functions of a typical life, a this-is-how-it-goes kinda world. But, as I've emerged from hellish muck, there has been a realization: the way we treat each other and the soil, the aching earth, needs to change. "A Personal History of Invasive Hands and Endangered Lovers" explores the relationship between intimacy and pain through a history of ecology and consumption, a melancholy of sorts. It amplifies trauma as a call-to-action and refuses to sit and take it. Although full of fracking and forest fires and sex, this collection doesn't fail to find the small, soft moments humanity will lose if it continues to not be careful. I view the collection as a light shot from a flare gun in the middle of the Atlantic's belly. Best read with a glass of local booze or hot blunt or on top of a mountain.

## Table of Contents:

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| He said I was a gem with no value, which is a rock, 5                                      | 5     |
| My Boyfriend and Jesus, 6  | 6     |
| To be consumed. 7-9  | 7-9   |
| One Less Trojan, 10  | 10    |
| My Grandmother's Cancer, 11  | 11    |
| A Drive-Thru America's Salad Bowl, 12  | 12    |
| I wonder if drowning here will be acceptable?, 13-14                                       | 13-14 |
| Post Coitum, 15  | 15    |
| Ritual, 16   | 16    |
| Sleepovers and Extraction, 17  | 17    |
| Not a Valentine's Day Poem, 18   | 18    |
| Clinical Depression at 3,000 Feet, 19  | 19    |
| The Way a Dream Reoccurs, 20   | 20    |
| Best Friends, 21   | 21    |
| Land Developer's Son, 22   | 22    |
| Sitting in the Passenger Seat of Landlord's Audi, 23                                       | 23    |
| Dreadmills, 24   | 24    |
| A Villanelle for the World on Fire, 26   | 26    |
| Wild Flowers, 27   | 27    |
| Seat Assignments, 28   | 28    |
| When I left Serious Lover, 29  | 29    |
| Some kinda love that happens in a bathtub, 30  | 30    |
| Ways White Men Burn, 31-32   | 31-32 |
| Corporate Lawyer asks, "What was the most impactful event of your childhood?", 33-34       | 33-34 |
| Last Night, 35   | 35    |
| First Underwear Store Fittings, Provincetown 2017, 36                                      | 36    |
| Vermont Heritage, 37   | 37    |
| Coffee Pots, 38  | 38    |
| Post-Sex Land Developer's Son asks, "What was it like growing up as an only child?", 39-40 | 39-40 |
| Whip Stitch Grafting, 41-42  | 41-42 |
| Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew, 43   | 43    |
| A Game Called "War", 44  | 44    |
| Dramatis Personae, 45  | 45    |
| A Note on Preserving Federal Land, 46  | 46    |
| Unfussy Watering Hole with American Food, 47   | 47    |
| How to Pack a Closet, 48-50  | 48-50 |

“My narrative falters, as it must. Let's face it. We're undone by each other. And if we're not, we're missing something.”

-Judith Butler

From *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, 23.

He said I was a gem with no value, which is a rock

Sugar Daddy points to my love handles when he says

*touch up*

and I run faster and farther the next day.

Ground spits,

I thump and break and drill The Earth

with Sauconys,

churning legs like the arm of an oil

well.

Every day I run 8 or more miles until my kneecaps plead and ankles

asphyxiate,

and a joint's cartilage is not plastic is naturally occurring

Elmer's Glue

is meant to bake and shatter on 98 degree pavement

with dry tears.

I discover the bones of my body and their rigidity,

a handlelessness,

protruding pelvis canvassed in skin like dead flesh in

a Ziploc Bag.

He said I was a gem with no value, which is

a rock.

We drive to consult, and plastic surgeons are plastic as in fake fruit

in hotel lobbies.

The silicone sits in front of me and the person I'd look like stares back,

petrified petro.

His tan BMW pulls into the garage with an angry hum from our unsuccessful

consultation.

I calm his control by the only thing he doesn't have,

youth,

which is The Hope Diamond and I hope it kills him one of these

days.

That night he fucks me on all fours, my kneecaps and ankles grind like the way your mind does

when you've made a bad decision,

and the checkbook sits under the toxic glow of barely breathing light

on the nightstand.

He finishes, looks me in the eyes, holds the entirety of my face, and says

*touch up.*

## My Boyfriend and Jesus

His hands are twice the size  
of mine and their thickness is exactly  
the size of his prayers, but my boyfriend

doesn't pray to God. My boyfriend  
is a carpenter who makes yurts, circular places to live  
in a forest's grasp. The way he holds me is

a belief, a kind of sinless comfort,  
a kind of sensitive morning light peering  
through the eyeglass of an icicle.

He murmurs about his mother  
and how they don't talk anymore.

After all, Jesus didn't have kids.  
Now I secretly watch four year olds  
cup their parents' hands and wish

I could live within the static flesh  
of their firm grasp, one pad of skin tucked  
into another, my boyfriend and his mother.

My bodily limitations  
are exhausting, but I've become comfortable  
with this failing pride, this holy idea

of not being able to procreate,  
of consuming her child's best years,  
of hearing a mother's constant silence,

which is a bowl of severed snakes  
floating in whole milk, because I want  
to give him kids. I want that fucking snakebowl

and to eat it too.

To be consumed

The walk from apartment to bus is masked (not because of COVID) but because of my raisin lungs, jingling with every breath. It's Day 4 with The Smog and I never considered myself a smoker, but with all this intoxicating air I don't think I have a choice. When I sleep, the raisins scrape against their walls

(corporeal limits are real (you are not young forever (Finite Beauty))). I'm "gay fat" in my community, which is when you have 10-15% body fat (an "average" amount). I once starved myself because Sugar Daddy said I should

(he wanted to show me off at a rooftop pool party, plasticity in chlorinated cocktails). At that party, I remember seeing a look-alike Michael (the statue one) feed hard, bulbous summertime fruit. He took a spoon (from the *best* stainless-steel flatware) and pierced pink flesh. I watched him contemplate the toxicity, *how drunk can I get this watermelon?* He let the spoiled flesh digest, nodded, and brought it out to identical men (picture abandoned speedos in a sea of bleach). Like blooming algae in late summer, the party was reinvigorated. It flowered and spread the way manure shoots from a tractor as marble-sculpted men threw beach balls, penis floaties, and dignity around. But let's talk more about Sugar Daddy. Why is Money so easily God? One time, I was paid \$300 for simply *chatting* with Sugar Daddy at a bar in Albany, NY. He picked up his glass and said, "Cheers, Son!" while patting me on the back, a golden crescent around his finger (looser morals back then). He was constantly on a liquid, pill-popping diet—they're all the rage nowadays. It's not that drugs are bad or I'm tryna get on my High Horse here, but I would like to talk about these wildfires or parts of the sea that are 80% plastic or the way autumnal maple leaves crunch underfoot with such veracity. I get off the electric bus and head toward the ventilated gym, ready to slice my raisins open.

On the treadmill: I'm beginning to understand how the planet feels (not being loved and all), so I hold a lot of men during sex. It's the place I'm most gentle, like dust settling in attic sunlight. The events with these men are as follows: Intense howling, gently lapping water, and a small cast-iron stove standing in the middle of a snowy cornfield holding a dish of chestnuts (it's always Christmastime in this place).



Gosh, don't you remember *snow*? Last year, September 16th was  
the first snow

(2 months ahead of schedule) on my best  
friend's birthday. She was a premature baby too, 10.3 inches,  
roughly the size of two lunar moths flirting. How precious it must  
have felt to hold her, to be trusted with such life.

Future America is: a bag of

dust,

skin follicles

from

that lover

over there,

and a brick of dried

oil.

Sugar Daddy can't get me out of this mess now,

ya know?

Amidst the vast,

dead expanse

I see the

10.3 inches

my best friend was

and remember

how we failed

to

keep                      the exact people  
we tried to protect

safe

(My raisins jingle,  
a pelvic bone points

out of the sand

toward

the sun,

nothing    )

## One Less Trojan

Why can I never see Preacher Son's irises  
when he's in me and why does she buzz-buzz

his phone in the middle of sex and why is there one less Trojan  
and why do we always speak in hushed tones in empty

rooms and why does his father still make hands wet with spit  
and why does he say *ok, mom* whenever I correct eXspecially to eSPecially

and why does the door eat the wall when he leaves and why  
does the gin taste like a brothel of pines on fire

and why is *Sam, baby* replaced with bro in the bar and why  
when I think of him it's too loud and

why will love be too many letters  
and why does this room suddenly feel hot?

Yet I breathe.

Yet here I am, taking pleasure in sweating alone, sprawled  
as a long-legged spider among dead sheets.

Sweat drips thick like cocktail syrup  
saturated from gin and organic lubricant.

Preacher's Son and I are in a fixed pattern,  
a constant kneading, one hand after another

into schmaltzy dough that's perpetual rising  
and lowering. The trash can is emptied with its shining

gladiator. He's a reminder to clean my caked apron  
from its locked closet, to open the windows during a Nor'easter,

to unravel from the denied experience  
he knotted me in.

## My Grandmother's Cancer

I like to fuck in the kitchen on shivering  
linoleum tiles, black and white, next to knives  
thick enough to slice through bone

the gas-lit flame gets close to my blonde  
curls and a scorched-earth scalp ensues,  
burning like a drop of chemotherapy

Death says the cold from the fridge feels  
good on his balls while bashing my hands in  
the door as blood spills down, caked in flesh

I remember when the doctor said you had a  
week left, he looked at me and described  
how the cancer would inevitably kill me too

and as he chokes me with finger-filled  
arthritis, I feel the air struggle and kick and  
almost know if Grandmother thought of me

before dying, before I cum with clear wings  
into a place too white and get as close to her  
as possible to try and fill empty.

## A Drive-Thru America's Salad Bowl

We drive past a farm with cattle.

So. Cal. fish tacos are 85¢ on Thursdays  
at Seeley Market, where the nearest body of water  
is the Salton Sea. There are 56 grams of salt per litre  
in this sea and the tacos only need pepper.

We drive past a farm with hundreds of cattle

and sit down. A diet coke for me (\$1.25)  
and a cherry, licorice, amaretto abomination,  
Dr.Pepper (\$1.50) for Serious Lover. It spills three times  
and I watch it stick, making a toxic tear  
along his thigh.

We drive past farms with thousands of skeletal cattle.

Miles of green, fluffy vegetation on the other side  
of the cattle: romaine, spinach, carrots, and arugula.  
After they're bagged and shipped it's: \$2, \$4, \$3, and \$5  
respectively (at WalMart). These people (daily immigrants from Mexico)  
who earn \$2.50, \$3.25, and \$3.75 hourly, and ship and pick and ship  
from 6am to 6pm to 6am.

We drive past farms with thousands of skeletal, baby cattle

and arrive back at his place  
in an air-controlled room fighting  
the 108 degree day. He licks my salty  
lips, grille underfed beef, and  
turn up a song called  
"Pony."

We drive past farms with thousands of skeletal, fresh-dying, baby, cattle

and I watch the Imperial Valley's desert  
eat what's already  
dead.

I wonder if drowning here would be acceptable?

The sound of laundry tumbles next to Landlord's room  
and the dog, Peter, nestles next to me.

Landlord's hand felt its way up my lower back  
and, as if it was the quick snapping of a tree struck  
by lightning, I'm reminded of a subway tunnel in the heart,  
a systematic series of slow endings

back in New Jersey.

That morning, I swept the patio for Serious Lover's grad party,  
"Adolescent Doom." The sweet tang of Jersey's radioactive breeze  
massaged my face while the leaves almost froze in the middle of summer.

The thought of Serious Lover leaving  
after this party felt like two forks slowly pulling pork,  
the stroking of a starving gator's tail, an emotional carcass  
decaying with its bloody perfume.

He touched my caramelized thigh and handed me cases  
of cheap wine, expensive gin, and Tennessee whiskey that lasted  
until no one knew the time. The party started with infectious  
old flames and the lighting of Colorado-cured cannabis.

Thick, sugary chicken split on the barbeque  
and I followed the smoke toward the sky's colorful homebrew.

Up here, I wanted to float with Serious Lover:  
the idea of us was limitless and flew  
with sandwich-filled seagulls and heavy bees--  
how sweet it was to believe I could love him forever.

My neon bathing suit sucked chlorine and seized  
skin as I sank to the bottom and touched the pebbled, stainless  
cement. This place, opposite of the sky, was a breathless  
diocese in liquid lamination.

I watched the stars and waved at The Hyades  
as they sent kisses back leaving traces of floating spume.

Backflips, front flips, love lips, the underwater trapeze,  
a circus until I floated to the surface and watched the festivities,  
ears wheezed chemically-imbued water  
(the fake stuff).

A former frozen leaf fell in the pool from the oak tree  
and in anticipation I watched it sink to the bottom  
as it whispered it a gentle please to try and feel  
something again besides this burning clarity:

I would leave this man with everything  
and a pack of cigarettes.

I looked up and saw a cyan-eyed stoner,  
Serious Lover, who took my hand amidst  
the chlorinated choral blue. What is this place?

He walked me over to the bonfire, a marshmallow zoo--  
flakes of new ash drifted further and further into the sky  
into the cigarette-lit residue of love.

The ground cracks beneath me, shaking open  
the start of my first earthquake.

## Post Coitum

I count on my fingers many trans-Atlantic trips I took  
to watch Serious Lover watch fireworks on Arthur's Seat

in the gossip of train tickets that detoured me to  
Norwich (to Ipswich to Leeds) to Edinburgh.

I was cold like my common, contorted fetal position  
on his burgundy-bruised couch, fuzz-stuffed.

Now, on my couch, I think of his brown-broiled,  
Jersey arms too busy for me to sleep in

but when I did sleep in them, my dreams were about a failing  
business in a gray town with one gay man,

two lesbians, and three churchgoers in floral silk.  
I would watch plum petals fall from silk to sidewalk and,

after frequent rain, into the drain where sunlight follows  
until his fat cloud cries again atop

Arthur's Seat.



## Ritual

In full-mooned midnight, I trace chest hair decorating  
The Preacher's Son, writing his name in cursive along the way.

Tents of hair stand along sloping pectorals,  
and a small town burns atop his body.

Tonight, a nipple-fire ignites for their missing leader  
lost somewhere on him, a wandering Neanderthal.

They curse: shit, fuck, bastard, etcetera  
while roasting a midnight lamb or soft human, extra crispy

for me: my hands are god on this preacher's  
son, wielding weapons of lust as though

it was my own body. In this full-mooned midnight,  
I imagine burning his built world:

how easily the body boils with sin,  
how caked and steamy I make him and his village,

how I have loved watching such wildness.  
Worship me. Make me his god. Give me control over chaos.

To know someone would break all the rules for a little bit of heat  
is a dripping satisfaction and maybe

I'm trying to reclaim my own lost parts  
as a hole to the center of the earth is impossible yet believed.

How a soul hole feels like a forgotten oil well,  
how lucid darkness can be.

Snoring interrupts.

Rain begins to spit and lightning tries to wake,  
but swallows this man and his inhabitants whole:

a village lost by the power of storm  
and yet I keep tracing and burning,

tracing and burning  
in a pile of soot.

## Sleepovers and Extraction

Unnamed touches me like spoiled flesh in bed,  
poking and prodding in his swelling room.  
Creaks crawl and drip toward the canyon  
and stitch our mouths without a peep  
until his parents' lights blackout.

It is never easy lying near his red head.  
The smell of greasy hair dances around me,  
a restless-fume, a curse, a boy-on-boy conquistador.  
His eyes jolt back and forth when he sleeps,  
and I wonder about the route his nightmares

travel, or if I should have said *No!*  
louder during his extraction. Spotted spiders crawl in and out  
of his mouth with ancient speakings while I lay empty and desecrated  
like too much land nowadays. Their furry legs  
scratch a linguistic redoubt,

language written in heartbroken bloodshed,  
all over my skin like etchings in a dead man's tomb.  
That morning, his mom pours us vigorous,  
sun-smacked orange juice and I hear the spiders creep  
down his throat like the pumping of rusty wheels:  
Unnamed and my deep dark holes.

Not a Valentine's Day poem

Dishwasher degrades 7-day plate scum  
 I killed a newborn cricket during my first night in this apartment  
 The sun has been hiding for three months  
 My Puerto Rican roommate asks *Is Montana racist?*

Rarely do my parents call me  
 Its shiny outside split like a cracked diamond  
 I shake my head and say

I think we're better off not talking, divorce and all  
 But tomorrow 70 degrees and sunny in mid-March

Tomato sauce stained my good Tupperware  
 Crickets, crickets molting everywhere

He has every right to be terrified in the states  
 I'll lie naked on a plowed pile of dirty snow  
 Mom blames it on Dad, Dad blames it on Mom  
 It smells like a cheap jar of massacred tomatoes

His girlfriend is coming from Puerto Rico this August  
 The soft song of dead crickets

Snow melts too quickly nowadays  
 Partly because people buy Tupperware

I don't know if infidelity was involved  
 He wants to make sure it's safe for her  
 The dishwasher runs again in hopes that water will burn the stains  
 He asks if I know of books outlining an "accurate" American history  
 Valentine's Day always reminds me of how bad it was

The planet is only heating up from here  
 Beams glisten atop the frozen pile of gems outside  
 Most nights I wake up to bug-like chirping, cricket ghosts

Now, I call my parents to try and save them

*You and your girlfriend will be just fine*  
 and melt on the snowbank outside our apartment.

### Clinical Depression at 3,000 Feet

Corporate Lawyer wears a pink polka-dotted shirt  
and steps in front of the blue-line bus, splatters

like a fly on an interstate windshield. His shirt's spheres  
roll down the crumbling bridge and dead-drop

onto a slowly-melting miniature iceburgh  
sailing along the now-crimson river.

An evening ray of sun spotlights  
the puddle of blood crowning him. Crows pick

worm-colored lips and try to get him to speak,  
but his only language is breathless.

## The Way a Dream Reoccurs

Marlboro Reds, crisper than cracked  
 rosemary, stain my sweatshirt as Father  
 fumigates the Ford F-250, and “Highway to Hell”

heckles him, the morning hedonist.  
 The engine asphyxiates on this cold, 6:20am  
 commute after his boozy breakfast.

He never liked the speed limit  
 set for everyone else as he drove  
 with his knee to the wheel swerving

and pancaking cherry-black cats.  
 Lights flicker, pouring in and beyond us.

*Fuck*  
 smokes in the car.

From a pot of spearmint gum,  
 he pops one in. The officer’s butt  
 chin and cologne wrangles

a car wet with Svedka and Reds.  
*35 in a 20?* Black-and-blue says.  
 Father replies, *Driver’s Ed*

*for my son.* The officer  
 scratches a ticket tickling  
 his wallet next to The Reds.

*How ironic,*  
*a teaching moment*  
*for your son.*

The engine  
 guffaws again, snow spits  
 underneath us. Slow silence

until we arrive at school,  
 running over every rosemary bush  
 on the way.

Best Friends

*for Sugar Daddy*

When you're all alone  
and you have no one to suck,  
this is like a bone  
but with more good luck.  
It'll make you moan  
it'll make you buck,  
your best friend is a dildo,  
a petro-plastic fuck.

# Land Developer's Son

Tonight, I sleep in this rich darkness  
     so close to him,  
 but the Union Square Countdown keeps me up  
     (dripping and ticking)  
 toward some kind of end-world.

I ask him to  
 tell me it'll be alright. He says:

    Scoop and dig,  
 sandbox apartment games.

    He calls them *Investment Properties*  
 built from limestone and seashells  
     (and minimum-wage labor).

He watches them be sky and suffocate  
     sun, strangling shade  
 over newly-born apple trees, starving  
     from root to rent.

Cover the crust and push them all out:

    All those nasty women,  
 all those nasty plants, all those nasty poor  
     people, all those nasty  
 "revolutionaries don't live in sandcastles"

    I say. Revolutionaries are the water  
 (a soon-to-be scarce resource,  
     scientists alert) and everything  
 in it: kaleidoscope turtles, large-eyed squids, trident-bearing  
     sea witches.

We cannot watch them pump, yet again  
     from the depths, yet again  
 from a black core: yet again, exploited labor:  
     oil, coal, flesh.

Sitting in the Passenger Seat of Landlord's Audi

*After Pound's "In a Station of the Metro"*

I watch Utah mountains melt in the middle of winter as we pass  
a homeless woman holding a cardboard sign, "God's not here."



## Dreadmills

Rubber burns beneath rubber on his LifeSpan treadmill,  
     my heart  
 poundspoundspoundspounds like the explosion of  
     soil  
 from Earth's face and Sugar Daddy watches me run, a visual extraction excavating  
     my warm innards:  
 tightening intestines, ripping ribs, amplifying arterial asphyxiation  
     *His new life*, he says  
 borrowing my genetic code to snort and bleed and inject and spread,  
     the consumptive drug of youth,  
 dependency decorated in gym shorts and runningrunningrunning  
     on hard petro  
 or driving into oil that's too bloody to be black.  
     He cackles  
 the way the devil might cackle, but more real and not  
     made up.  
 I am being watched, am a hamster in a clear plastic ball, am no different  
     than the well itself.  
 Working for his dollar-sign gaze, day and night and day and night,  
     feeling its deep pumping.  
 The dreadmill is our next generation, where we will die in a pool  
     of acerbic gold.

## Last Vacation with Gram

Beach spot territory:  
plastic chairs as barriers,  
sand castle molds to developing  
apartment, mini shovels  
for backyard pools.

As I build a city from granules,  
she takes her ham and cheese sub to the ocean.

I watch her sink into sand  
like lobster dipped in butter  
while waves cover calves,

hungry  
for my assembled world.

A Villanelle-Inspired for The World on Fire

So much of love is learning to burn  
 Oil Diver tells me while picking up his socks from my floor.  
 Coniferous smog enters the room, we have to learn.

He says “Damn smoke” without concern  
 but what happens when we awake flaming dinosaurs?  
 That grandiose meteor, it led to their lovely burn.

The end-table succulent (lonely too) yearns  
 for sunlight and I can barely see my reflection, clouding spores.  
 His smog enters my mind, it hasn’t learned.

I smell the destruction of baby ferns  
 and he doesn’t text me back for days, *how valor?*  
 It’s his love that burns.

People evacuate laptops, I have heartburn,  
 and this is more apocalypse in disguise, *the climate farce*.  
 All I can smell is smog, too late to learn.

*Goodbye*, it’s the point of no return:  
 no pines, no mountains, no sun, and flooded lakeshores.  
 Every surface of love shouldn’t burn,  
 but the coniferous smog is him, learned.

## Wild Flowers

### *For my Father*

I believe there is good in humanity,  
a type of good that's a bouquet of wild daisies  
given from one jagged-toothed boy to another

or a bee on a daisy carrying packs  
of pollen to fill honeycombs for the necessity  
of its hive, but always a secret

to everyone except the runt  
of an Australian Shepherd litter  
or a large-eared, Indian elephant.

I might have believed he was good,  
but there was a particular way he held anger  
like oil cementing a pelican  
or blinding a seal  
or glueing the fins.

Ground-gagging,  
earth shatters like spilt glass  
from the empty pint, because anger is fracking  
and a loosening of the world with the hands  
of small men.

For a long time, I believed men  
could not be good until a jagged-toothed boy  
gave me a daisy, untouched.

## Seat Assignments

I sit in 1B. The woman next to me is a martini olive (drip) and already asleep. The plane's plastic seat covers crawl against bodies, and I feel the person mine ate. This Boeing 737 burns 5,000 pounds of oil (drip) 750 gallons per hour and the flight to San Francisco is 5 hours, is 3,750 gallons spewing a murder of vexed crows that devour the remaining carcass my seat couldn't eat.

Gin cackles upon a fortress of ice and tonic (drip). My clear cup cradles the concoction and I watch America from above. Mechanical specks move (drip) and thrust underneath the plane, thousands of miles below. Kale-green communities wilt from Tycoons gulping fossilized bones and it loosens earth with every straw-sucking sip. The plane jumps,

and I remember earthquakes cannot be felt from above, they cannot be felt in first class, but what happens when we wake the dinosaurs? Acidic, greenblack scales (drip) will trample Tulsa and Flint and engorge Stillwater in a slow plague. I wash my hands (drip) and let the seat begin its feast.

Sugar Daddy bought me this ticket, a carcassed, first-class graveyard (drip). I drink creamy pearls from the hands of a flight attendant, full of falsified smiles, and know him: under the heaviness of Sugar Daddy (like a million dirty pennies) consigning the skin that wears me, the holes I tighten.

This dripping dresses me in expensive Daddy-bought clothes, a disguise from my own blue-jean family. I'm now an elusive substance, a permeable thought: to be rich is to never worry and evade earthly matters, much like the stench of the woman next to me, much like the understated 5,000 earthquakes in 2015.

I look back at all of the faces in economy, people who might live in a place called America, and I've sold every inch of my flesh to my seat, to the dinosaurs, to Sugar Daddy.

When I left Serious Lover

sex became breakfast,  
the names of men  
were unknown,  
and a small fortune was lost  
on latex and lube.

I looked in the mirror  
before leaving  
Oil Diver's house  
one day  
and noticed  
my nakedness,  
my gaping hole,

a hole  
where a heart wasn't,  
an unfillable  
gas tank,  
a pot of soil  
with no bottom.

Some kinda love that happens in the bathtub

Some kinda warm bubbly like champagne's  
gurgling mouth or froth from an east coast sea:

The tub's creamy pink plastic to skin to cell  
to lavender soap to candles decorating

the bathroom like a city skyline. Big toes manufacture  
ripples mimicking the guitar's wooden beat (scratchy vinyl

plays above a soaked floor). I dip feet into 99 degrees, ankle first,  
ass second, face third, and float like an edifice of coral flesh

hiding under a landscape of bubbles. The record and rippling mute underneath:  
Silence like a pond's foggy breath like a boiling lake at the end of the world

like the boiling ocean swallowing me whole. I want to be jellied here  
in a weightless hanging, a casket held together by hard plastic and lavender.

A chain is lifted, relieved from choking, and the drain sings  
across the vintage tub. An evaporating tide circling into a hole

that goes somewhere and nowhere. From head to toe, it lowers  
and kisses me like the water we are born in.

## Ways White Men Burn

He assures me,  
*with some white man jargon,*

this man-made wildfire is  
*fine, under-control, God will take care of it.*

The sun is a match melting The Preacher's Son's cigarette  
and I watch fat billows climb toward the summit.

His menthol puffs taste sweet next to me  
as incandescent spiders crawl out of the Marlboro

with every flawless stream of smoke. Their glass legs  
hold onto humidity and land atop the burning

mountainside, hissing like humans.  
This fire is a lost spark spoken by Preacher's Son.

I hear the same about our relationship  
and its secrecy, its gently sneaking trepidation

always waiting for an angel or pope to crawl  
from cracked earth and bless us.

I feel like a list of endangered species  
tucked away in conscious denial.

He says, *I'll only come out when my father  
stains your forehead with holy water.*

This water is boiled and blessed and spackled,  
but never drunk or flooded to combat flames or given to restore

the softly soiled faces of people without a house  
or a sink or access to clean running water.

The irony here is all about the effort it takes  
to boil unused water.

As I watch The Preacher's Son call firefighters and let spruce trees  
shrivel into pieces of charcoal at his behest, I wonder:



if I went into the blaze and let it kiss  
every inch of my flesh, let it engorge me from toe

to teeth, would this deathly provocation  
matter to him? Would it stir him in a definite way?

Could his God crystalize my burnt remains  
and turn this world into a thousand-year-old vase,

the extortionate heirloom generations fight over,  
the only way to display freshly-jeweled lilacs?

The fire inches closer to us atop the mountain.  
It crawls near our untouched, uncalled, unused feet.

I often feel like I have power over men  
by simply loving them, by believing they are fragile

glass spiders, but he finds himself encircled atop  
the mountain's peak like a drunk wasp in a full glass of wine,

like a runaway killer surrendering in a beam of light,  
like a father in a pulpit.

Corporate Lawyer asks, *What was the most impactful event of your childhood?*

I remember memorizing the unit circle for Pre-calculus during her chemotherapy, a perfect mathematical formula like her imperfect white blood cells.

My head stretches out of the delicate cotton-polyester hole and I stare into the pre-washed, spotted mirror. An ex once said my eyes are scottish moss after dark rainfall, but they're actually my mother's. Along with a bumpy nose and the signature navy blue turtleneck, they are museum-grade replicas.

Grandmother's dying began with muffled cries in bedrooms, but it quickly became a fist-full-of-anger reckoning The Almighty. Projected shouts aimed toward popcorn ceilings and pine floors and to each other. They were reminded of mortality: a gilded pocket watch emitting a slow tick from denim souls. *Love you* was replaced with flinging screen doors and the stink of denied pain, pain only expressed by drinking radioactive waste, a toothless and drunk decay.

Grandmother's cancer was 7 years, was a long death.

Within the stringy hazel codex, they remind me of a time when Mother used to be happy, when she'd sing to hardening pancakes and boiling maple syrup, when she and Grandmother would venture every weekend for another antique fair or pinecone-scented Christmas market.

Stage 4 breast cancer is, if I may, a bitch or a cluster of unwanted root vegetables growing in a field of ripened watermelons. We picked and picked and picked those fuckers. Disease hollowed our family, licked it like a dripping creemee, ate us whole, and asked for more.

Corporate Lawyer doesn't understand when I stopped the silver, 2010 Ford Focus and stared directly into the falling sky and felt her departure.

When Grandmother was in the hospital bed saying *You know what this means, don't you?* I was a wax figurine. Beavers vigorously ate my skull's creamy insides. Her arm

was so swollen with fluid it looked like a slender Happy Birthday balloon, a supersaturated waterbed.

He doesn't understand how I am always missing my car keys in ignition, its chain: a perfect circular unit.

## Last Night

My 14-year-old body stepped  
into the steam of the sizzling Sunday  
shower. I let the water scald me

and watched Unnamed's fingerprints, stained  
with my blood, melt from skin. Last Night  
kept seductively whispering its bitter breath

into my ear, reminding me that  
his wandering body simply *made a mistake*  
*fucking me*.

Was that God's touch? As I left the shower,  
church clothes masked the body I wore, graffitied  
from rough, clenched hands.

An hour later, sitting in the front pew,  
I met Gram, and together we sang  
*Hallelujah*.

First Underwear Store Fitting, Provincetown 2017

“Flown from Italy last week”, says the Underwear Consultant  
grinning at how the cotton cuts my curves.

The consultant and Sugar Daddy won’t stop talking  
about its fit: *Elegantly contours, Perfect for Twink Week 2014*,

*My boyfriend doesn’t even look that good.* Their stares  
lather me up with slippery coconut oil, make my cheeks puffy

and bright, an unwanted flattery. Sugar Daddy has a kind of staring that sculpts  
buttery figurines with a plastic knife, a kind of staring

we never consent to. Like a loose egg hiding in the back  
of the fridge, I enter the dressing room and stare into the mirror

only to immediately disremember, disembark from looking at the body  
I wear but a body who now wears me like a pistachio in its nut,

green with creamy pompousness.  
To burn this shit mirror, spoon the eyes of onlookers,

shatter every glass of wine,  
fill every puddle with dark water and harrowing clouds

how good would it feel to reclaim the veneers  
that tell us who we are or who we should be, a pointed finger.

The Italian underwear is bought anyway  
with Sugar Daddy’s AMEX to make our foreplay better

but truly to take me to “bedroom parties” and brag  
about our age difference and my ass

but truly for him to gaze upon  
a rotting body: an aging fact.

## Vermont Heritage

There's an otherworldly beauty to farmers  
     they say:  
 Dirt sleeps underneath saw-hardened  
     fingernails,  
 skin tanned from sun refracting neon blue particles  
     to every surface,  
 an inability to enunciate the "t"  
     sound.  
 Many people fear the effort it takes  
     to plant  
 in the Spring and harvest in the Fall, flora  
     and fauna's commitment.  
 They ask, "What state is Vermont in? Or, are you from  
     Canada?"  
 We know how to put food on your table  
     and milk  
 the skim you drink from cows my dead grandfather  
     inseminated.  
 His gloves went all the way up to his shoulder and kept  
     reaching.  
 Boudreau, our last name, means farmer, means herbology  
     and heritage,  
 means healing in the ground next to deeply orange  
     carrots,  
 in the rancid smell of dirt and cow manure, nature's  
     sweet snot,  
 in the eyes of fattening potatoes, in greenpink rhubarb  
     stalks  
 reaching toward summer's raw and heated rays.  
     When Spring surfaces,  
 Greigii Tulips dance in sobbing weather on  
     my bed.  
 They radiate fresh pollen and the world smells like  
     a wedding.  
 Bushes with bleeding-hearts and wood lilies reemerge  
     as a reminder to grow  
 and understand how Earth can only give  
     as much as we take,  
 to remember we are the product of generational survival,  
     trauma and preservation.

## Coffee Pots

### *for Gram*

line the shelves  
with tattoos of roses,  
geraniums, and daisies,  
and the walled facade steams  
with your aromatic laughter. They  
bloom, perspiring the smell of hazelnut  
decaf with a *touch* of milk. Tulip-yellow  
packets of unopened Splenda lie crystalized  
in time. She still lives here, sunlit.

Post-Sex Land Developer's Son asks, *how was it being an only child?*

We sculpt thick crowns of bubbles  
on each other's head as an heirloom rubber  
ducky floats through suds-studded adventures.

The towel on the bathroom's linoleum  
soaks supersaturated imaginations gone wild  
and prune-fingered. Our giggles are jumpy

and hula-hoop from one end of the house  
to the other. Some nights we secretly climb into my bed  
and lowly snicker all night, washed and wet-headed.

I lose him defending myself, keeping the very gay secret  
hidden and lost, pushing my fellow flight partner  
to the outskirts of a trash-loved city.

I am perpetually waking at a too-early hour,  
eviscerating everyone in my path including him,  
the only person who could've understood.

We slowly drift apart like melting butter  
running to edges of a saucepan.

Home began feeling like a house  
with each tumbling year:

My brother, the new best-kept secret.

We're in our 20-somethings now,  
almost frontal-lobe flippant, and it's me, once-best-friend brother,  
and Mary Jane.

Eyes swell, veiny  
and bulging, and the joint shakes  
in my nervous hands after years of never being

alone together. An ember falls from my mouth  
and liquefies one spot on the carpet

as I talk about how I am sorry  
because land is repaired through an intense

reconciliation process: it is shared, ours but not,  
a process of loosening such a firm grip,



of letting go and giving soil back.  
He understands my earth and I understand his,

like bathtub sailors we giggle again  
and jump into the tiny bluewhite lake

blowing large bubbles to the surface  
as soft stoners melting  
the carpet.

## Whip Stitch Grafting

To wear your skin:

slip it on like a onesie  
install a zipper in the front  
dance in a field of begonias  
(their petals like your nipples)  
(twinsies)

I grew up in a world  
built by the hands of women,

who taught me how to whip  
stitch the heart of a tiger, how a needle

may puncture the left ventricle  
with an incredible amount of ease

if you want it to, if you think love  
tastes better than blood.

I want to feel what you, Unnamed, felt beneath your palm  
that night

Did my neck crack like the shell of a spotted Maine lobster  
(still dead from silicone magnums)?  
(I am the lobster)  
(Consumed)

but I have learned to live, to date men with a considerable  
tolerance for their tardiness and moderateness

and all I want to do is ride their faces  
to shut them up, but

it was silent that night (when you sexually assault someone  
it usually is), a world

pancake-flipped, served cold  
and chunky.

I remember I talked for three days after  
to remind myself *I am still here*

*breathing and living and safer than I was  
and I won't jump*

into a lobster-filled tank, mindlessly clawing  
to protect The Thought and the stew that follows  
(but the stew happened anyway)

It went something like this:  
Fists full of angry, starved 'gulls  
squawking from palm to palm,  
furiously picking at the holes in my hands.

There was bleeding and lost cartilage  
that fell from hand to sand to sea.  
To see your own decay is to laugh  
in the face of God and realize you have won.

But I will never forget our history, Unnamed.  
I want to change the deep-sea pattern  
and make you molt too.

Yes, I want to graft your skin:  
to volunteer at the homeless shelter  
to raise money for dogs  
to host liberal-leaning galas  
to clean plastic-filled seas  
to restore endangered species' habitats  
to ask consent before fucking someone

to say more than I ever could and not eat you,  
but to sew your heart whole.

You are my Unnamed.

Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew

Sitting under willow trees, Serious Lover  
collages a board of local bread, brie, and prosciutto.  
Bulbous rhododendrons look as if they kissed our wine,  
wet-lipped and woozy. Upon munching, we watch curation:  
soil is carried as if it were an eight pound infant,  
trees are trimmed like clipping a dog's nails,  
and this is an imagined paradise.

## A Game Called “War”

Another log is stuffed into the cast iron stove  
as we bundle up the house and herd pets inside,  
simple precautionary measures for the impending  
snowstorm. Behind the house is a cornfield

full of stalk stumps and The Abandoned  
Airstream Bus, blue with graffiti and lost windows.  
Neighborhood boys sometimes use it as a military outpost  
(not a rocket to Mars or rainbow artist colony).

I watch them shoot stick rifles and launch  
rock grenades and animate other imaginary hauntings  
young boys shouldn’t want so intensely: Raspberry bushes  
become barbed wire, split milkweed is painted underneath eyes,

and burdocks gently rip flesh from bone. One boy  
starts crying and Mom urges me to go out there  
and check on them, but I don’t know how to mend their  
severedness, the chasm between love and loneliness,

a hearth and The Abandoned Bus.  
I think the answer might start within the wood stove  
as each splintering crack is used to heat this home,  
the soft speaking against a Nor’easter.

## Dramatis Personae

Corporate Lawyer..... How to manipulate environmental laws?

Destroyed Land.....Both the ground underfoot and my body, breathing.

Father..... How desperately I want to love you.

Grandmother..... How desperately I did love you.

Landlord.....Inorganic flesh made from paycheck stubs.

Land Developer's Son..... A lover who underestimates the shovels he wields.

My Boyfriend.....I'm actually dating his mom.

Preacher's Son..... Religious embodiment of The Closet.

Serious Lover..... At times, an unrequited love. At times, the only person who understood.

Sugar Daddy..... The transaction from human to plastic.

The Oil Diver..... Humanity's straw.

Therapist..... Major Arcana Tarot Card: Death (Change, New beginnings).

Unnamed..... One by one, I pulled his claws out and recycled, reclaimed his power.

## A Note on Preserving Federal Land

We end up on the steady tip of Sex Peak, Montana  
    (I have been many times before)  
and set the candy-yellow trailer against the caramelizing  
    sunset. Therapist brings out an untouched  
Cab Sav, pops it, and I watch flowers grow out of the bottle  
    and writhe toward the ground.

Let me reach with them. Let me savor and yearn  
    with gentle fingers full of pollen,  
ready to be carried away on the hips of a bumble bee.  
    Rarely do we let others carry us  
in the square of our back pockets (green on the ass with grass)  
    but let me hold him and wander

through the flowering carnalities of phacelias  
    and irises and buttercups,  
through strong ventricles of deciduous root systems  
    (beneath the earthy face),  
through roaring campfire karaoke and midnight  
    ashen speakings.

We wake to sprinkled, crystalline dew over the trailer  
    and watch fog dissipate  
from cotton to cloud to the stringy memory  
    of last night. This morning,  
we're all plum smiles and hot yolks  
    and federal land.

Unfussy watering hole with American food

Dollar bills are stapled to every surface  
of this locals-filled dive: cash-only, \$5 ATM withdraw fee,

but we were desperate, “starving” white boys in search  
of grub and adventure and a pound of cow

on Avenue A. *It’s a good deal, right?* the waiter says  
gesturing to the menu. Powdered mashed potatoes, a futuristic food

for doomsday preppers who get their water from sweat,  
and they appear as a clouded lake next to greenbrown beans.

We’re a post-apocalyptic meal made from dust. After feasting,  
Serious Lover and I walk around, stretch calves, and count shattered beer bottles

on Bombay Beach. A diesel truck attempts dune-buggy jumps, pumping  
large fumes from its devilish horns. The sheriff is either dead or

the driver. A pier, heavy with salt tumors, points  
out of the Salton Sea toward a gambling god, remembering

its old ghost: Sinatra, The Beach Boys, Munroe, speedboat paradise,  
fish stocked from ancient bodies of water.

Sand once saw a fleeting glory, a forgotten kingdom:

Weathered planks hang onto a rusty prayer, sunlight disappears  
somewhere below dark water, beach grass no longer sings.

I mumble under my breath to you, Destroyed Land,  
and recognize our deep hollowness from knowingly clumsy hands,

*At one point, this place was the world.*  
*A good deal, right?*



## How to Pack a Closet

Crystalline champagne  
glasses are blanketed by dust,  
once wet with a wedding, twice  
with a divorce.

The coat you wore  
in New York City as a  
certified Pan Am agent  
is surrounded by fluttering  
moth balls.

Photographs, dirty  
with decay, show you cancer-less  
and a full-toothed smile.

My uncle and mother's  
book series are bleached in time:  
The Hardy Boys, Nancy Drew,  
Yearbooks (72'-76', 77' is  
missing).

A purple Polo, Church  
khakis, and leather loafers await  
Christmas in Gram's closet.

My company:  
The Preacher's Son  
and Corporate Lawyer  
and Sugar Daddy  
and Landlord  
and God

are lined against its back wall.

There is a secretive  
seduction in our whispers,  
gyrating gently from mouth to ear,  
ear to hand, hand to pant like the smooth *hum*  
of an electric sander.

We sit under the skin of animals: otters,

bears, and foxes all in heat.

Bodies entangle,  
I smell blood fusing together like rusty  
nails dripping down The Cross.

Custard-colored turtlenecks  
fall from the shelf above and Sunday-best  
scarves choke.

Tiptoeing notes interrupt  
this ménage-a-trois and I come  
up for air.

Sitting next to the closet's door  
is a hickory music box Mr. Football  
Player gave me.

I remember.

*This*  
he said,  
*is only for you*

Whenever I wound  
it up, a gear would fall off, a spring  
would let loose or its arm would get stuck  
in the about-to-throw-a-ball position.

Its mobility was limited,  
but the box could sing  
*Hallelujah.*

I almost gave it back one Sunday  
wearing May's graduation gown,

but there was nostalgia in the way  
it snapped every note (the crack of his hungover voice)  
and whispered *keep me or save me or love me.*

I think of how softly he used to take my hand  
and trace every protruding vein. I think of how I used to do the same  
to your hands, Gram, in hospice after you died.

The body is a map, always  
keeping score, and there is no difference between  
your dead blood and this closet: all its stuffiness  
somehow packed into memory, a pressurized  
and pooled choking.

Now, this machine  
turns itself sitting on a fly-ridden  
floor and is tired from twitchy singing.  
I take the vocal gears, stop the gentle ticking,  
and place it on the penultimate shelf  
next to your tin urn:

ash,  
a warmed hickory.

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